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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001544

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV; PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [ECON](#) [EINV](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: FOREIGN-OWNED NEWSPAPER FEELS THE POST-KHIN NYUNT HEAT

REF: A. RANGOON 1522 AND PREVIOUS

[B](#). RANGOON 1518

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Australian co-owner and editor of Burma's only non-GOB English-language newspaper, under serious pressure from the regime, has appealed to Rangoon-based ambassadors for statements of support should his publication "be closed down for any reason." Like many others who enjoyed the protection of the Khin Nyunt empire, his company is paying the price for having relied exclusively on connections to the ousted Prime Minister. We would not view any U.S. interests at stake should The Myanmar Times and its editor, a regular apologist for the SPDC, go down in flames. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) On December 3, Ross Dunkley, the Australian CEO and Editor-in-Chief of Myanmar Consolidated Media, circulated an open letter "for the information of all ambassadors in Yangon." Dunkley, who oversees several local publications and allegedly owns 49 percent of an English-language weekly, The Myanmar Times, appealed for foreign governments to issue statements of support in the event that his newspaper "were to be closed down for any reason."

[1](#)3. (SBU) On November 29 authorities arrested U Myat Swe (aka "Sonny Swe"), Dunkley's business partner, and detained him under section 5(j) of the Emergency Provisions Act. Sonny Swe is the son of Brigadier General Thein Swe, formerly a senior military intelligence (MI) official under ousted Prime Minister Khin Nyunt. BG Thein Swe himself was a victim of the post-Khin Nyunt purge of MI and is reportedly detained at Insein Prison.

[1](#)4. (SBU) In his December 3 letter to Rangoon ambassadors, Dunkley claims that Sonny Swe is accused of "using his father's influence to bypass the censorship process" by seeking GOB approval for each edition of The Myanmar Times through MI, rather than through "normal channels" at the Ministry of Home Affairs and its Press Scrutiny Board. Dunkley also claimed that the GOB has in recent days requested that he turn over detailed documents on the company's financial and legal affairs.

[1](#)5. (SBU) Dunkley has claimed at various international venues, most notably in Bangkok and Washington, that his newspaper is fully independent and that he uses the publication to "push the envelope" and press for free speech and other political changes in Burma. The Myanmar Times does, on rare occasion, publish limited news about events generally considered off limits by state media (e.g. natural disasters inside Burma, international meetings that discuss Burma developments, etc.). However, as Dunkley freely admits, his publications are subject to government censorship and "sensitive" articles routinely hit the cutting floor. The Myanmar Times never criticizes the military regime and each week prints a robust assortment of articles that praise GOB officials and the achievements of the SPDC.

[1](#)6. (SBU) In the December 3 and 6 editions of the Burmese and English language editions, respectively, The Myanmar Times published an article detailing encounters between diplomatic missions, including the U.S. Embassy, and members of the NLD, a legal political party. The article also gave an account, with many factual errors, of an encounter between Emboffs and a recently released political prisoner. The article, which accused diplomats participating in these meetings of "interfering in the internal affairs of Myanmar," is identical to a string of recent articles which publishers claim they were forced by the GOB to print (ref A). An expatriate reporter for The Myanmar Times approached the COM on December 2 and told her that the article was being published at the direction of the Press Scrutiny Board.

[1](#)7. (SBU) In his appeal for support, Dunkley states that The Myanmar Times has "never once in five years embarrassed the government or Myanmar." He continues, "In line with the policies of the government we have always wholly encouraged the development of the road map" and "we are...a very visible example of a successful Myanmar-Foreign cooperation." Dunkley concludes that "I hope your government would defend The Myanmar Times..and see it as an integral part of the

progression of the SPDC on its road map and transition to democracy."

18. (C) Comment: Dunkley enjoyed a cozy relationship with MI which allowed him to publish the only English-language newspaper in Burma outside of official media. Like many others who once enjoyed the protection of the Khin Nyunt empire, his company is paying the price for having relied exclusively on connections to the ousted Prime Minister (ref B) and he feels particularly vulnerable now that his once well-connected Burmese business partner, and the partner's MI father, are behind bars. We would not view any U.S. interests at stake should The Myanmar Times go down in flames and/or Dunkley meet the fate of his business cohorts. The expatriate community might lament the loss of a rare source of English-language local entertainment and social news and the Australian Embassy may have a sticky citizen case on its hands. However, the political impact would be close to nil, other than giving pause to foreigners engaged in or contemplating joint ventures with the Burmese regime. End Comment.
MARTINEZ